

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

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It is generally asserted that all Marias are dirty, and object to washing. It is true that Maria women dancing late at night after lying on ground covered with the ashes of camp-fires, or men and women in the *penda* fields or after a long march, are dirty; and anyone who has tried to dress a Maria's wounds knows how dirt-encrusted they can be. Sleeping between fires, or over fires in an enclosed and low-roofed hut, does not promote cleanliness. But the real reason for the idea is the fact that the Hill Maria seldom washes his loin-cloth. On this, Russell and Hiralal say (III, p. 124) :—

'In Bastar they seldom wash their clothes, as they think this impious, or else that the cloth would wear out too quickly if it were often washed. Here they set great store by their piece of cloth, and a woman will take it off before she cleans up her house, and do her work naked. It is probable that these wild Gonds, who could not weave, regarded the cloth as something miraculous and sacred, and, as already seen, the god Palo is a piece of cloth.'

This passage is all wrong. Palo is unknown to Maria or Muria Murias and Bison-horn Marias wash their clothes, and there are occasions when even a Hill Maria is bound to do so. He may not weave, himself, but he makes nets and baskets and twine, and always accepts the manufacturing processes of Kumhar potters, Kammar blacksmiths, Gharwa brass founders or Mahra weavers in a commonsense, rational way; he sees the work done quite often, and indeed there are many Marias who, in jail for homicide, have themselves become expert weavers of cloth or carpets. The reasoning processes of the savage are not unlike our own, and it is always safe to reject any such explanation as that he does not wash his cloth because he regards it as impious to wash something so sacred and miraculous, when there is available the commonsense economic explanation that he himself gives, that cloth costs money, of which he has never much, and that the oftener it is washed the sooner it wears out. So ordinarily, when a Hill Maria has his dip in a pool or river he takes off his filthy and inadequate loin-cloth and hangs it on a bush or rock while he washes his limbs, fastening it again all dirty on his clean body when he emerges. The women remove their loin-cloth, but not their *mundang*¹ and the cloth attached to it. Both husband and wife, however, must bathe in the morning after sexual intercourse and wash their loin-cloths; and a woman must invariably bathe and wash her loin-cloth, beating it out well on a stone, on leaving the menstruation hut or room at the end of her courses and of the four weeks following the birth of a child. Generally men and women wash or bathe every morning, and more often than not in the evening also. There are separate pools in

¹ The *mundang* is explained below, under dress.

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PERSONAL APPEARANCE

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292 Sometimes the 'fig-box' is made of a lattice of split bamboo strips.
 535 Generally a streamer or two of red or blue cloth hangs down from the back of the *topi* or turban. Over the chest a sort of sleeveless vest of red cloth is worn, almost neck-high, and over this from breast to waist, strands of white cloth are twisted, back and front, so as to produce a rib-like effect, the ribs radiating from a central double plait of cloth running vertically from navel to breast, then passing on either side of the neck and repeating the pattern in the rear. The 'ribs' vary from five to nine in number, according to the means or taste of the dancer. This cloth arrangement is known as *gatikar-hana*. Below is worn a long skirt of red-edged white or dark blue cotton, called a *kochi*, with a white or coloured sash round the waist over the bottom of the 'ribs' and the top of the skirt; the sash is called *poriya*. Over the sash round the waist runs a cord, from which is suspended over the rump a great bunch of large and small pellet-bells (*muyang*), in the middle of which two or three large clapper-bells often are prominent. From the neck is hung over the back of the shoulders a basketry dancing-shield or *moghi*, made to slant downwards away from the back by two hoops of bamboo protruding underneath. Over the top of the shield either streamers of coloured cloth reaching nearly to the ground, or peacock's tails are looped. The shield is made of two targes of twined basketry joined together so that the rough edges are in the middle; the warps are flat slices of bamboo about 13 mm. wide, radiating from the centre of the targes, and the wefts, the twining of which begins from the centre, are for the most part thin rods of bamboo pared to the thickness of a straw; but at intervals bands of red are made on the targes by using red yarn from the markets as wefts for three or four rounds of twining; flakes of shining mica are worked into this yarn, and over the outermost red band often cowry shells are sewn. The ends of the bamboo hoops are forced through the joined targes and held either by horizontal pieces of bamboo tied across them, or by ornamental studs of *cirs-pardue* brass-work. When not in use, the dancing-shield is never kept inside the house, but either 292
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 285 sewn up in leaves and hung high in the boughs of a tree, or on the outer wall of the *wanda* or granary under the eaves; this is to protect it from smoke, sun and rain. Each dancer makes his own dancing head-dress and shield. Formerly every dancer held in his left hand the handle of an axe, of which the head, decked with coloured cloth streamers, protruded behind his back; and the axe was a *pharsi* with blade shaped like vulture wings. Now even the ordinary Maria workaday axe is ceasing to be used, a twisted tree-root, or plume of peacock feathers with the stalks plaited together in a basketry pattern, or a stick, taking its place.

VILLAGES AND HOUSES

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Lowu

- 1 *alpanji* platform for storing produce.
- 10 large baskets, containing grain and forest fruits.
- 1 blue dancing skirt or *lechi*.
- 5 gourd bottles.
- 1 axe.
- 2 sickles.
- 4 large earthenware pots.
- 1 ditto, used as *Hanal Kunda*.
- 1 hearth, used as *Hanal O'idai*.
- 3 very small earthenware pots of pigs' fat.
- 6 thick bamboo oil-tubes.

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Most houses have, besides these, a number of drums, more bows and arrows, fishing-rods, lines and hooks, snares, nets of varying mesh for fish, birds and animals, throwing spears, fibre for making string and rope, hemp or grass for the same purpose, sandals of raw cow-hide, thongs of cow-hide, and *kor-guda*, or funnel-shaped hen's nests on bamboo posts about two feet high. They keep the bulk of their grain and forest fruits in their granaries, and the baskets in the house contain only what has been removed from the granary for current consumption; there are generally to be found quantities of new baskets made for sale at the bazaar. The baskets are of all shapes and sizes, and amongst other items include flat baskets something like winnows for use as platters, which they hold up full of food to their mouths. (251)

The granaries, whether built singly or in a long row, are almost invariably built on piles, the floor being 3 or 3½ feet above the ground. This not only protects the grain and dried fruit stored in the granary from damp and white ants, but, as already remarked, provides an extra sleeping place for the males of the family and any male guests. There are three rows of piles, the two outer ones being tree trunks, seven or eight feet high, cut with a piece of a bough forking off at the floor height and trimmed short as a rest for the horizontal beams which support the flooring; the central piles have similar forks turned inwards at floor-height to support the floor beams, but are two or three feet higher above the floor than the outer piles, as they have to support the roof-tree. The upper ends of these long piles are either naturally forked or else notched to support the horizontal roof beams, which bear a thatched roof constructed in the same way as the roofs of dwelling-houses. Planks are laid across the floor beams at the points where these rest on the lower forks of the piles, and a flooring of bamboo wicker-work is laid on them. The walls are made of bamboo check wicker-work, the wefts being carried on around each corner of the building, where a thin pole resting on a floor plank forms the corner warp; the other warps are unsplit bamboos, but (255)•

Granaries 343

174 DOMESTIC LIFE AND ECONOMY

757 nostrums like the use of red-ants for fever or python-flesh for
 752 pot-belly already mentioned, and cauterization is the only treat-
 Maria ment he knows for simple injuries or foot-crack (just
 treatment as he brands the flanks of ailing cattle). A Maria
 of disease bitten by a rabid dog at His Excellency Sir Montagu
 Butler's Christmas camp at Kondagaon in 1927 refused
 point blank to be sent out of Bastar to Raipur for Pasteur treatment,
 but ultimately as a concession to the general anxiety asked to be
 given the body of the dog, and ate its liver. ⁶ To Marias illness is
 754 generally a manifestation of something malignant, either the magic
 [787] of a human enemy or the ill-will of a god or spirit. At funerals,
 steps are taken to ascertain whether magic was the cause of death ;
 in illness a medium is called in, or a *wede* or *gunia* with knowledge
 either of spells to defeat the spirits of evil or of the white magic
 means of blowing away illness, *jhara phukna*;⁷ epidemic or epizootic
 755 disease may be defeated either by palisading the village after
 sweeping it clean, and posting guards with bows and arrows to
 shoot the demons of illness, as was done by Hill Marias in the great
 influenza epidemic of 1918, or by special disease-riddance ceremonies
 like the annual ceremony described on page 140. Yet such is the
 Hindu's faith in their 'medicine' that in 1930 the late zamindar of
 Sukma hastened his death when in the last stages of diabetes by
 taking the advice of Bison-horn Maria 'doctors' or *gunia* to the
 effect that he had two intestines, one of which had withered like
 a dead plant, while the other, though withering, was still partly
 green and could be revived if the patient fed it with lumps of
 black earth.

B. Manufactures

● 285 In the preceding chapters frequent mention has been made of
 basketry, for Maria measures, grain bins, walls of houses and fences,
 dancing shields and so on. The Hill Marias are great
 1. Basketry basket-workers, men and women. The men make
 all the big basketry bins for storing grain and the large baskets sold
 at the markets, as well as dancing shields and fencing and matting ;
 the women make the basketry measures, basketry plates and the
 smaller domestic baskets, as well as brooms of various grasses,
 which are generally plaited together at the top by basketry methods.
 In camps, Hill Maria youths almost invariably employ any spare
 time in basket-making. Bison-horn Marias on the contrary leave
 it almost entirely to their women, except that the men make the
 basketry caps that are the basis of the *tallagulla* bison-horn dancing
 headdress, and fencing.

8 [see cat. 116, p. 421. - AW454]

MANUFACTURES

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The favourite basketry material is bamboo, in thin strips varying from half an inch to three-quarters in width. Occasionally the wefts are of reed, coloured twine, or bamboos pared down to the thickness of twigs. Patterns are produced by using warps of dry bamboo strips from the heart-wood, and wefts of green strips from the outer rind. Nearly all the Hill Maria basketry is twilled, with each weft passing over and then under two or three warps, the topmost edge or rim being twilled-twined with a weft of thin bamboo pared to the size of twigs; and sometimes an ornamental plaited ring is worked around the central circumference. The measure baskets made by the Hill Marias and brought by them to the markets for sale or for measuring out the grain which they sell or the salt which they buy are of different shapes and sizes for each commodity. The grain measure is a *bhurki*, eight of which make a *sol*² or half a seer, i.e. a measure containing about a pound's weight of rice. There are slightly different sizes for rice, *kutli*, mustard and pulses, according to the size of the different grains; all *bhurki* measures are little round baskets with slightly convex bottoms and uniform in diameter at top and bottom. For salt, a rather similar basket called a *hochli* is made, sufficient to hold one pice worth of salt, of roughly the same capacity as a *bhurki*; they are graduated for smaller quantities by being plastered inside with varying quantities of mud or cow-dung. *Mahua* flowers are measured by being heaped on shallow dishes called *kurli*, shaped like inverted cones or Annamese hats; each should contain 4 *paillis*, or 128 *bhurkis*, and those that I tested were remarkably accurate. The Hill Marias sell also the flat basket dishes already referred to, but rather larger than those they use for their own plates; they are called *bediya*.

Frequent mention has already been made of the Maria blacksmiths, and some of their tempering and manufacturing methods have been described in the section dealing with

2. Iron-work weapons and tools. These blacksmiths appear to be of Maria stock, speaking the Maria language, indistinguishable physically, having the same phratries and clans, and following the same customs. Enquiry in the big blacksmith settlements at Bagmundi Panera in Jagdalpur tahsil, at Kamargudem below the Arampur ghat in Konta tahsil (both Bison-horn blacksmith villages), and from the Hill Maria blacksmiths at Nugur in Kutru zamindari, showed in every case that some of the blacksmiths either had themselves once been cultivators or had fathers who were originally

² 5 *tolas* or Government rupees' weight of rice is contained in one *bhurki*: 8 *bhurki* = 1 *sol*, 4 *solis* = 1 *pailli*, 2 *paillis* = 1 *ori*, 2 *oris* = 1 *kurli*, 20 *oris* = 1 *khandi* = 40 *paillis*.

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1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949

AW32 Cond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

• 285



Bison-Horn Maria women making a mat

[Lester E. Davis]

[End Plate K]

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

276 pipes. These are lit with little bits of glowing coal picked from the fire, and
 883 when half-smoked or not in use are generally kept tucked into the turban or
 hidden in a hole in the ghotul wall.

276 But the chelik do not rely only on the tobacco supplied them in the ghotul.
 531 Any enterprising boy has tucked into his loin-cloth or hanging (sometimes
 with a bunch of bells or cowries) at his waist a specially-made tobacco-pouch.
 These *gota* are, as a glance at the illustrations in Figs. 82-4, 93-5, 99, 103-4,
 and 109-14 will show, elaborate and varied. They are of every size and shape.
 One is like a fish, another carved like a wheel, a third resembles a mango.
 Some are of garud, moda or koraya wood, others are cut from the kernel
 of a fruit, a few are of brass. The stoppers are fitted tightly with a little lac.
 Some are covered with the testes of a goat or sambhar. Most are elaborately
 carved.

Many of the *gota*-pouches are named. There is the *dudong-gota*, round as
 a girl's breast; the *chakha-gota* (Fig. 77), a beautifully carved wheel; the
hemul, or tortoise pouch (Fig. 79) with its elaborate designs; the charming
marka-batta-gota (Fig. 112) shaped like a mango; the *halāri-gota* (Fig. 83);
 the *min-hāp-gota*, with its decoration of fish bones; the *tumar-gota*, whose
 carving resembles the flowers of the ebony tree; the *giras* or lizard *gota* (Fig. 82);
 and the *damera-āching-singār gota* (Fig. 110) with its elaborate silver
 decorations. Some of the *gota* have a deliberately sexual purpose; the
 [83] *pudo-gota* (Figs. 94 and 99) has small representations of the vagina carved
 on it and the *dudo-muri* (Fig. 101) has marks that are supposed to resemble
 the pimples round the nipples of a woman's breast. The chelik show
 these to girls to excite them. But, indeed, as I show in another chapter,
 to ask for tobacco is itself a polite way of asking a girl for sexual congress.

249 The Muria grow tobacco in specially fenced gardens near their houses and
 sometimes in enclosures made on the banks of stream or river. When it is
 ready, it is cut and allowed to dry in the garden. Then it is placed between
 layers of kodon straw 'which turns it red in a few days'. After this it is dried
 again, this time on the roof of the house, and finally tied up in bundles with
 home-made string.

VI. THE SLEEPING-MAT

X 883 The *gik* or *masni*-mat is an important piece of ghotul furniture. When a
 352 boy joins the ghotul for the first time he is expected to bring a mat which
 is usually made for him by his mother or an aunt. Later on, especially in
 the *jodidār* ghotul, a girl ought always to make a mat for her special chelik,
 but elsewhere the mats seem to be made by a boy's mother, sister or some
 other female relative. At a marriage a new mat is usually presented to the
 bridegroom.

285 The mat is not difficult to make. A rectangle is marked out and pegs
 driven into the ground at its four corners. Bits of bamboo are tied between
 the pegs at opposite ends of the rectangle and a dozen or more strings of hemp
 or grass are tied from one end to the other so as to form the warp. Before
 they are attached, they are threaded through the holes of the *āḥ*, a wooden
 instrument illustrated in Fig. 96 which is used to beat the grass into place.
 The woman sits down with the *āḥ* before her and threads bits of
 reed or grass over and under the strings. After she has threaded two or
 three she sprinkles them with water and pulls the *āḥ* sharply towards her
 several times, thus pressing the grass into position. This is done over and
 over again until finally the mat is complete.

PERSONAL ADORNMENT AND POSSESSIONS

These mats are kept at home and boys or girls bring them rolled up under their arms at night to the ghotul. In some villages this is the special duty of the girls. When they arrive they go round saluting the boys and presenting them with their mats. This is known as *Masni-johar*.



FIG. 96. The wooden *aká* used for making a *masni*-mat
Length 1' 10"

The mat is very definitely a sexual symbol and many ribald jokes are connected with it. The new mat given to a bridegroom at his marriage is generally smeared with oil 'to make it slippery'. Once when I was sitting down in the village of Amgaon a *chelik* brought me a *masni* but an old man said, 'Don't sit on it, it is covered with semen', and everyone thought it very amusing. It is supposed to be a great honour to be given a mat by the *chelik*, probably just because it is a symbol of so much excitement and romance.

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Plate LXXXII

306



Motiari at Bandopal making
bead necklaces

A woman at Remawand
makes a mat

● 285



[p. 406 (B)]

411 in this book, but the Maria have a fine spear used for stabbing. Bows and arrows are not unlike those in use elsewhere. The arrows are either pointed or clubbed. Pellet bows are used for killing birds, as is the *engram*, the many-pointed wooden arrow which is illustrated here. The pointed iron arrow is that employed in most of the murders by shooting or stabbing. But the *engram* was used in one or two cases.

412 Implements of domestic use include the heavy rice-husker which is so constantly in the hands of the women. With this Oyami Masa in a fit of rage battered his cousin to death at Jabeli.¹ The Bison-horn Maria hoe (*korki*) is similar to that common in the plains, and a man once used it to kill his mother in a fit of drunkenness.²

283 The Maria have no subsidiary industries worth the name.

286 Spinning and weaving is taboo to them, though they are allowed to spin rope from hemp and grass. They make

• 285 baskets of leaves and bamboo, but mostly for their own domestic use. They are expert at making mats, which they either weave with grass and reeds on a frame or plait with bamboo slats. The Maria do their own ironwork and do it

326 well, for there is a plentiful supply of excellent ore. Those
565 Maria who take to smelting and blacksmithery are regarded as inferior by the others who generally do not inter-marry or eat with them. This rule is not, however, absolute and in other ways the Maria blacksmiths live as members of the tribe, join their dances and festivals and share the common life. For statistical purposes I have included the Maria blacksmiths among the other Maria in this book.

III

771 The religion of the Maria centres round the Earth, the State and the Clan. The Earth is the ultimate source of life and is personified in the Village Mother. The State is represented by Danteshwari, the tutelary goddess of the royal family: she is now sometimes identified with the Earth Mother or the Village Mother, but she often has a shrine or at least an image of her own, and her cult is rapidly increasing in popularity.

771 Developing out of the cult of the earth is the worship of
776 the clan-god. The traditional theory is that every clan is
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¹ Case No 62.

² Case No 72.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

AW32 Gond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

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*Girl cleaning grain
at Tihampal before a
decorated door*

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*Hings, a Maria girl of
Rewals*



[Facing p. 28]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

AW32 Gond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

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Girl with basket at Marenda

Girls breaking pods at Khutepal

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[Facing p. 29]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

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*Apparatus for distilling
mahua spirit*

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*Detail of memorial pillar of
Kopa Dharua at Maissenar,
showing people serving rice-
beer*

273
285
415
417



Woman making rice-beer

[Facing p. 96]